



File Code: 1950; 2800
Date: February 12, 2016

Dear Interested Party,

The Kootenai National Forest (KNF) has issued its Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (Draft SEIS) for the Rock Creek Project. The Rock Creek Project is a proposed underground copper and silver underground mine located in northwestern Montana near Noxon in Sanders County. The KNF Draft SEIS is enclosed for your review and comment. RCR (a subsidiary of Hecla Mining Company) proposes to construct, operate, and reclaim the proposed Rock Creek Mine. RCR currently holds mineral rights for the Rock Creek ore deposit beneath and adjacent to the Cabinet Mountains Wilderness (CMW) in the Cabinet Ranger District of the Kaniksu National Forest, which is administered by the KNF.

The KNF and the Montana Department of Environmental Quality prepared a Final EIS for the Rock Creek Project in 2001 (2001 FEIS). The KNF has prepared this Draft SEIS in response to a March 29, 2010, U.S. District Court decision in *Rock Creek Alliance et al. v. USFS, Revett Silver Company, and USFWS* (CV 05-107-M-DWM and CV 08-028-M-DWM consolidated). In the case, the U.S. District Court found deficiencies in the 2001 Rock Creek Project Final EIS and directed a SEIS and new Record of Decision (ROD) be prepared. The deficiencies found by the U.S. District Court are that the Final EIS: 1) failed to clearly require Revett Silver Company, now RCR, to implement the sediment source reduction measures during Phase I of the project; 2) did not consider supplemental information about bull trout populations and habitat in a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) document; and 3) did not clearly show effects on Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas. In addition, to ensure a complete analysis of the proposed mining project, the SEIS will update other resource analyses if there are significant new circumstances or information relevant to environmental concerns and directly relate to the proposed action or its impacts. KNF will use the analysis in the SEIS to determine whether to issue approvals necessary for construction and operation of the Rock Creek Project.

Alternative V is the KNF's preferred alternative. All of the adit and mill facilities and a small portion the paste tailings disposal facility under Alternative V would be on National Forest Service lands currently managed for wildlife habitat, recreation, and commercial timber production. In January 2015, the Regional Forester approved a new forest plan for the KNF. The Draft SEIS includes an evaluation of the consistency of Alternative V with the 2015 KFP. Based on this consistency analysis, the Forest Supervisor shall determine whether a KFP amendment is needed for the Rock Creek Project.

Your comments will be invaluable to the KNF as they prepare the Final SEIS and Record of Decision. In accordance with 36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) §218.26, comments must be postmarked or received 45 days from the date the Notice of Availability of the Draft SEIS is published in the Federal Register. The Notice of Availability will be published on February 19, 2016 and the 45-day comment period will end on April 4, 2016.



Written comment can be submitted to Michael Huffine, Kootenai National Forest, 31374 U.S. 2, Libby, MT 59923-3022, or by email to: rockcreekmine@fs.fed.us. Comments can also be hand-delivered to the KNF between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., excluding holidays. The subject line must contain the name of the project for which you are submitting comments.

The predecisional objection process described in 36 CFR §218 is now in effect. Under these regulations, individuals and entities who have submitted timely specific written comments, as defined in 36 CFR §218.2, regarding the Rock Creek Project during any designated opportunity for public comment are able to seek predecisional review of unresolved concerns before a Record of Decision is signed. 36 CFR 218 describes the predecisional objection process in detail.

In accordance with 36 CFR §218.8., to be eligible to request predecisional review of unresolved concerns before a Record of Decision is signed, comments must include: (1) name and postal address, (2) title of the proposed project or activity, (3) specific written comments regarding the proposed project or activity, along with supporting reasons, (4) signature or other verification of identity upon request and identification of the individual or entity who authored the comment(s). For comments listing multiple entities or multiple individuals, a signature or other means of verification must be provided for the individual authorized to represent each entity and for each individual in the case of multiple names. A scanned signature or other means of verifying the identity of the individual or entity representative may be used for electronically submitted comments, (5) individual members of an entity must submit their own comments to establish personal eligibility; comments received on behalf of an entity are considered as those of the entity only. All comments become part of the public record associated with this project, and are available for public review, along with the name(s) of the commenter(s). Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who submit anonymous comments will not be eligible to seek predecisional review of unresolved concerns before a Record of Decision is signed under 36 CFR part 218.

Thank you for taking time to be involved with the Rock Creek Project. For more information concerning the Rock Creek Project contact Michael Huffine, Project Coordinator, Kootenai National Forest, 31374 U.S. 2, Libby, MT 59923-3022, 406-293-6211. More information on the proposed Rock Creek Project can be found on the KNF's website:

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/kootenai/landmanagement/projects>

Sincerely,



CHRISTOPHER S SAVAGE
Forest Supervisor

Encl.